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SAINT MURA.

By REV. WM. REEVES, D.D.

THERE are several saints who flourished in the seventh century, and acquired great celebrity as the founders of churches or the patrons of tribes, and yet of whose age and history we have no exact account. St. Mura is one of these; and nearly all the little that is known of him is collected by Colgan, at his festival, the 12th of March, under the title "De Muro sive Murano." He was the son of Feradhach, and sixth in descent from Eoghan son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, the ancestor of the Kinel-Owen. His mother was Derinilla, surnamed *Cethair-chicheach*, that is, 'Of the four paps,' as we learn from Aengus' tract on the Mothers of the Saints of Ireland: "*Derinill cethar chiched mathair Domangairt mec Echach ocus Ailleain ocus Aedain ocus Mura Fhothna ocus Mocuma Droma bo ocus Chilleain Achail chail i lLeith Cathail ar ur traga Duine droma.*"—[*Book of Lecan.*]—"Derrinilla of the four paps, mother of Donard son of Aughy, and of Allen, and of Aedan, and of Mura of Fahan, and of Mocuma of Drumbo, and of Killen of Aghakeel in Lecale, on the border of the strand of Dundrum." The curious epithet applied to Derinilla, Colgan interprets, not as a monstrosity, but as a figurative expression to denote that she was four times married. And this opinion is strengthened by the circumstance that St. Donard's father was Aughy, whereas Feradhach was St. Mura's.

None of the Irish Annals record the name of this Saint, and it is only by his pedigree that we are enabled to approximate to his date. Colgan calculates from the fact that he wrote an account of St. Columba who died in 597, and that he was in the fifth generation from Eugenius who died in 565, (*rectè*, 465,) and accordingly fixes his date after the beginning, or possibly the middle, of the seventh century. We can calculate even more closely than this, by taking the names of his kinsmen, who are equidistant from a common ancestor, and making an average for his age. The genealogical lists, coupled with the Annals, give the following as his co-ordinates:

Maelcobha, King, died in 615; his brother Domhnall in 642. Segene, fifth abbot of Hy, died in 652. These were of the race of Conall Gulban. Maolfitrigh, son of Aodh Uairiodhnach, died in 631; he was of the race of Eoghan, and more immediately allied to our Saint. The average of these allows 635 for St. Mura's obit, to which we may safely add ten as he was an ecclesiastic, and set down 645 as an approximation to the date of his death. A successor, probably his immediate one, died in 657.

He founded the abbey of Fathain, on the west side of Innishowen, which retained its monastic character for many centuries, until, at last, under the name of Fahan Mura, it sank into the condition of a parish church.



Drawn from the Original by D. Brown, Danvershire

Lithographed by Marcus Ward & Co. Belfast

ST MURA'S BELL.

PLATE I

St. Mura was the patron saint of all the O'Neills, and being sixth in descent from Eoghan, their founder, whose patrimony Innishowen was, and from whom it derived its name of Innis-Eoghain, it is probable he had ancestral claims on the lonely spot which was chosen for his retirement.

Colgan states that among other monuments which were preserved in his monastery, was a metrical account of the Acts of St. Columba, of which fragments were extant at his day, and of which we still have some remains embodied in the original Irish life of St. Columba by O'Donnellus, deposited in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Also a large and very ancient volume of Chronicles, and other records of the country, held in great value, and often cited by those engaged in the study of antiquities. He states that there were also extant, until modern times, numerous reliques of St. Mura, and other saints who presided over this church; but that how far rescued from the fury of heretics, and still preserved, was unknown to him, living, as he then was, far away in Belgium, though in early years well acquainted with the place. He adds that there was extant in his day, and preserved as a most sacred treasure, the staff, or pastoral wand, commonly called *Bachull-Mura*, i.e., 'Baculus Murani,' enclosed in a gilded case and adorned with gems, by which many miracles were wrought, and through which, as the avenger of falsehood, and the unerring evidence of right, in cases where persons wished to remove all doubts from their declarations, or to terminate a controversy by the solemnity of an oath, the pious people, and chiefs, and especially the members of the O'Neill family, were wont to swear.

Colgan adds that there was also in existence, previously to these troubled times, a Proper Office for this saint, a fragment of which he once saw, and in which were recited some of his signs and miracles.—[*Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ, xii. Martii, p. 587.*]

The following notices of St. Mura's monastery in the Annals of the Four Masters, are evidence of the early importance of the place:

A.D. 657.—"Ceallach, son of Saran, abbot of Othainmor, died." We calculated 645 as the year of St. Mura's death, which allows 12 years for his successor.

A.D. 720.—"Cillene Ua Colla, abbot of Athain, died." His festival is set down in the Calendar, at the 3rd of January.

A.D. 757.—"Rovartach, son of Cuana, abbot of Athain-Mor, died."

A.D. 769.—"Ultan hUa Berodherg, abbot of Othain-mor, died."

A.D. 788. (*rectè* 798).—"Aurthaile, abbot of Othain, died."

A.D. 818.—"Fothadh, of Fothain, died." This is supposed by O'Conor, and with reason, to have been the celebrated *Fothadh na Canoine*, or 'the Canonist,' of whom mention is made in the Four Masters at 799, and Annals of Ulster at 808.

A.D. 850.—"Lerghal, abbot of Othain, died."

A.D. 1070.—"Fearghal Ua Laidhgnen, abbot of Othain, died."

A.D. 1074.—"Cuairrge Ua Ceallaich, successor of Mura, died."

A.D. 1098.—"Maolmartin Ua Ceallaich, successor of Mura of Othain, died."

A.D. 1119.—“Ruaidhri, erenach of Othain-Mor, died.” The Annals of Ulster supply his family name of *Ua Dornain*.

A.D. 1136.—“Robhartach Ua Ceallaich, erenach of Fathain-mor, died, after a good penance.”

It will be seen from the above, that the office of ‘herenach’ in this church became hereditary, after the middle of the eleventh century, in the family of Ua Ceallaich, or O’Kelly. In the early part of the seventeenth century the family of Donnell MacNeale O’Donnell were returned as the ancient herenaghs of Letir, in this parish; the *Mounter-Heiles*, as the herenaghs of Sleane and Millquarter; and the sept of Murtagh O’Donnell in the quarter of Lisbanagh.—[*Inq. Ulst.*]

The place is twice mentioned in the Annals, without reference to its superiors.

A.D. 716.—“Three wonderful showers fell this year; a shower of silver in Othain-mor; a shower of honey in Othain-beg; and a shower of blood in Leinster.” This is recorded in Tighernach, at 718. The Annals of Ulster omit the shower of silver.

Othain-beg was probably in the neighbourhood. That it was in the barony, we learn from the Calendar of the O’Clery’s, where, at the 8th of July, is commemorated, “Colman Iomramha, of Fathain-beg, in Inis-Eoghain.” There is a place called Templemoyle in the townland Luddan, in Lower Fahan, (Ord. Sur. s. 296,) which may be the ancient Othain-beg, and thus cause this parish, which in point of income is inferior to the other portion, practically to be the Little Fahan.

A.D. 1429.—“Rory O’Dogherty died, at Fathan-Mura-Othna.” This last entry affords an instance of a reduplication of a new upon an old form. Mura Othna means Mura of Othain, but the annalists forgetting this, write, ‘Fahan of Mura, of Fahan.’ Thus in the Annals we meet the name in a variety of forms: *Athain*, *Othain*, *Fathain*, *Fothain*, *Othain-mor*, *Fathain-mor*, *Fathain-mura*, and *Fathain-Mura-Othna*. *Athonmura* is the equivalent in Pope Nicholas’ Taxation; *Fathunmurra*, in a Patent Roll of 1310; *Faynwor* in Colton’s Visitation, 1397. It is now written *Fahan*, and pronounced *Fawan*.

In modern times the parish has been divided into Upper and Lower Fahan, the latter having the town of Buncrana, the former the ancient site. The road from Buncrana to Derry passes close to the gate of the old church-yard. Within it are some remains, principally the east wall and window, of a middle-age church. Beside them stands a very ancient table cross, carved with the Irish pattern, and similar to, but finer than, those of Donagh and Cloncha. Outside the gate, at the left, is built into the wall a curious cut-stone with a bore through it, and on the right a stone having on it a very chaste Greek cross; both evidently from the church-yard. The church-yard being shaded with trees and the grass long, summer is a bad time to examine the ground; but the inquirer might find a good deal, between inspection and report, to repay him for a visit, in early spring, to this lovely as well as interesting spot.